

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01
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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2039
INFO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE
AMEMBASSY BERLIN
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW
USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 0368

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SOPN, PFOR, PINS, CZ, SHUM, EAIR, ETRD
SUBJECT: PROTEST AGAINST CZECH DETENTION OF NBC CORRESPONDENT COLLITT

REF PRAGUE 0346

1. SUMMARY: ON FEBRUARY 7, THE EMBASSY REGISTERED A STRONG
PROTEST WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SIXTH DEPARTMENT OVER THE FEBRUARY
3 DETENTION OF NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT LESLIE COLLITT ON THE
CZECHOSLOVAK-GDR BORDER. MFA OFFICER SAID HE HAD NOTHING TO
ADD TO DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTRY SPACIL'S RECENT COMMENTS TO THE
AMBASSADOR ON PRESS QUESTIONS, BUT TOOK CAREFUL NOTES ON OUR
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PROTEST AND PROMISED TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER WITH MINISTRY'S
PRESS DEPARTMENT. MFA IS SHOWING INCREASING NERVOUSNESS OVER POSSIBLE

US RETALIATORY ACTION, WHILE TRYING TO STEER BILATERAL
RELATIONS ALONG BUSINESS-AS-USUAL COURSE TO THE MAXIMUM DEGREE
POSSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. DCM CALLED ON ACTING DIRECTOR OF MFA SIXTH DEPARTMENT NOVOTNY TO PROTEST AGAINST THE FEBRUARY 3 NINE-HOUR DETENTION OF NBC NEWS CORRESPONDENT LESLIE COLLITT, WHO WAS REMOVED FROM TRAIN WHILE ENROUTE TO WEST BERLIN FROM A TWO-WEEK VISIT TO CZECHOSLOVAKIA. AFTER REVIEWING FACTS OF THE DETENTION (REFTEL), WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO CONFISCATION OF SOME 90 PAGES OF NOTES, DCM SAID EMBASSY MUST PROTEST IN STRONGEST POSSIBLE TERMS AGAINST THE TREATMENT ACCORDED COLLITT BY CZECHOSLOVAK BORDER GUARDS. DCM NOTED THAT THIS IS ONLY THE LATEST, BUT MOST SERIOUS, INCIDENT IN RECENT SERIES OF CZECHOSLOVAK ACTIONS AIMED AT EITHER DENYING VISA APPLICATIONS (TO MURRAY SEEGER OF LA TIMES) OR HARASSING US JOURNALISTS WHO DO RECEIVE VISAS TO COME HERE (E.G. MICHAEL GETLER OF WASHINGTON POST). THE EMBASSY COMPLETELY AGREES WITH COLLITT'S OPINION THAT HIS CONDITIONS OF ACCREDITATION AS A JOURNALIST WERE GROSSLY VIOLATED. MOREOVER, IN THE COLLITT CASE AND OTHER INCIDENTS RECENTLY, GOC HAS NOT RESPECTED CSCE FINAL ACT PROVISIONS RE "IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS FOR JOURNALISTS."

3. NOVOTNY TOOK POSITION THAT HE HAD "NOTHING TO ADD" TO DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER SPACIL'S JANUARY 31 REMARKS TO THE AMBASSADOR CONCERNING PRESS MATTERS (PRAGUE 0307). HE TOOK SEEMINGLY CAREFUL NOTES ON DETAILS OF THE COLLITT DETENTION AND SAID HE WOULD RAISE THE ISSUE WITH MFA PRESS DEPARTMENT DIRECTOR KADNAR TO TRY TO LEARN REASONS WHY COLLITT WAS DETAINED. NOVOTNY MADE A POINT OF STRESSING GOC DISSATISFACTION, HOWEVER, WITH WHAT HE CALLED "UNOBJECTIVE" COVERAGE OF CZECHOSLOVAK DEVELOPMENTS IN US PRESS.

4. DCM THOUGHT US JOURNALISTS WERE SIMPLY DOING THEIR JOB, REPORTING ON EVENTS OBJECTIVELY AS THEY SAW THEM. CZECHOSLOVAK ACTIONS TOWARD

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US JOURNALISTS, HOWEVER, HAD REACHED A STAGE AT WHICH WASHINGTON MUST BE EXPECTED TO BE INCREASINGLY SERIOUSLY CONCERNED--ESPECIALLY SINCE ISSUANCE OF US VISAS TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS IS BASED SQUARELY ON RECIPROCITY. IN THIS REGARD, DCM DREW ATTENTION TO FEBRUARY 3 DISCUSSION OF APAO WITH MFA PRESS OFFICER, WHO SEEMED TO BE HINTING THAT GOC MIGHT REFUSE FUTURE VISA APPLICATIONS BY GETLRE OF WASHINGTON POST AND MALCOLM BROWNE OF NY TIMES(PRAGUE 0346).

NOVOTNY SAID HE PERSONALLY HOPED BOTH SIDES WOULD REFRAIN FROM DENYING VISAS TO THE OTHERS' JOURNALISTS. HE CLAIMED HIS SIXTH DEPARTMENT COLLEAGUES HAD ALWAYS SOUGHT TO FACILITATE VISA ISSUANCE TO US JOURNALISTS AND ALWAYS STOOD READY TO DISCUSS MATTERS WITH AMERICANS, INCLUDING JOURNALISTS.

5. RECALLING THAT SPACIL HAD MENTIONED TO THE AMBASSADOR THAT FOREIGN VISITORS SHOULD GET THEIR INFORMATION FROM OFFICIAL CIRCLES, AND NOT FROM "A SMALL GROUP" OF DISSIDENTS, DCM ASKED FOR NOVOTNY'S OPINION ON INDICATIONS IN THE LOCAL PRESS THAT DISSIDENT WRITER VACLAV HAVEL IS IN PRISON AWAITING TRIAL. NOVOTNY NERVOUSLY

DISCLAIMED ANY KNOWLEDGE OF HAVEL BEYOND THAT PUBLISHED IN THE NEWSPAPERS.

6. AS MEETING CONCLUDED, NOVOTNY ASKED WHETHER EMBASSY HAD RECEIVED RECENT INFORMATION ON RENEWAL OF EITHER US-GOC AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT OR BILATERAL TEXTILE AGREEMENT. DCM SAID EMBASSY EXPECTED NEWS RE AIR TRANSPORT AGREEMENT SOON, BUT HAD NO INFORMATION ON TEXTILE ACCORD. NOVOTNY ALSO INDICATED GOC WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO COMMENCEMENT IN MARCH OF TALKS ON IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM FOR CULTURAL/SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGES AGREEMENT, AFTER EMBASSY PAO QUINN'S RETURN TO PRAGUE FROM HOME LEAVE.

7. COMMENT: WHILE NOTABLY CORDIAL, NOVOTNY APPEARED NERVOUS OVER POSSIBILITY THAT PERSISTENT CZECHOSLOVAK HARASSMENT OF US MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES MIGHT WELL LEAD TO RECIPROCAL ACTIONS BY USG, WHICH WOULD ONLY ADD TO EXISTING BILATERAL STRAINS. HIS INQUIRIES REGARDING AIR TRANSPORT, TEXTILE AND OTHER
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BILATERAL MATTERS REFLECT DESIRE TO CONTINUE A "BUSINESS AS USUAL" COURSE WITH US TO MAXIMUM DEGREE POSSIBLE, DESPITE WIDESPREAD INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM OF THE HUSAK REGIME'S ATTEMPT TO STIFLE THE CHARTER 77 ADVOCATES OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
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